

Especially for roo

Written by dreamkatcha. Any related videos, as always, can be found on my YouTube channel.

None of this would have been possible without the fantastic resources generously provided by immensely talented emulator authors, and communities such as Hall of Light, Lemon Amiga, Lemon 64, World of Spectrum, Moby Games, World of Longplays and Recorded Amiga Games. Thank you for your tireless dedication to preserving the history of gaming.

When I was a kid it somehow *wasn't* embarrassing to admit you watched the perennial Aussie soap opera, Neighbours. You just did, and it was accepted as the natural order of things. Maybe because it was still fairly fresh in the late '80s cynicism had yet to take root, who knows? Yet like it or not, it *was* the launchpad for a procession of genuinely talented actors and singers. Russell Crowe and Guy Pearce would be the highlights for me from that era, although Neighbours never ceased to be a place for upcoming stars to 'cut their teeth', so to speak. I hear rumours that Kylie and Jason did OK post-Neighbours too.

No surprise then that at least one developer/publisher showed an interest in translating the Melburnian melodrama into a playable computer game. That company was Zeppelin, the year was 1992 and you *didn't* dream it. Perhaps they *weren't* such great galaaaahs after all! Oops, wrong soap. That was Alf in Home and Away... I'm reliably informed, by someone else, who isn't me, honest m' lord. I bet it was that

Chris Foulds who immortalised the ripper title into the Everything Amiga hall of shame last December by way of a video review (probably in the *arvo* while out driving his *ute* on the way to a *barbie*). Fair dinkum cobber! Any Australians reading, please accept my heartfelt apologies. It's just that the law of retro gaming demands weary old retro 'humour'. 1970 called, but I was in the shower at the time.



Released under their Impulze label, the double-taking title amounted to a single-player, isometric skateboarding racer. Think Atari's 720 degrees styled in the mould of Paperboy with an impressively authentic rendition of the Neighbours theme tune ushering in a pixelated recreation of the most famous street on the planet, and you're in the right skate park.

The same team who brought us Edd the Duck and Santa's Xmas Caper - Ian Copeland, David Taylor and Adam Gilmore - once again collaborated to ensure one of the most bizarre TV

show tie-in license games came to pass, albeit rapidly fading into obscurity.



You play as the pop-singing, colourful-coated heartthrob, Jason Donovan, aka Scott Robinson who for no determinate reason races around key landmarks in Erinsborough on a skateboard wearing a crash helmet, elbow and knee pads and his most glistening, pearly white underduds.



Up against five of your Ramsey Street cohorts occupying a menagerie of quirky vehicles you must dodge obstacles such as stones, gaping drains, Des Clarke's wayward car (you'd think he'd drive more safely given that his wife was fatally mown down by one), cast carrying mirrors or surfboards to and fro, space hoppers, Helen Daniels with her artist's parallel palette, rabbits, a power-walking Harold Bishop, kangaroos, possums, ostriches, Bouncer the Labrador, Todd Landers racing his menacing remote control car, and steely-eyed battleaxe Mrs Mangle wielding a rolling pin... and breathe, for one should never punctuate lists of obstacles and assailants. It's practically the law.



"Imagine it: you've captured the license of the century. So what sort of game should you design? A 'Mrs Mangel Is Dead' whodunnit? A 'Bouncer The Dog' ball-chasing game? Well, at least some sort of arcade adventure incorporating all the TV characters... Yes?

Nope. Impulze lash out the dosh for the license of Neighbours (including likenesses of the Ramsey Street mob) and churn out a decrepit skateboard race game. Still, it might be worth playing: maybe there's some stonky, original cube-gleamin' going on?

Er... no. Take the graphics of Paperboy, the gameplay of Skate or Die, the lasting interest of Back to the Future II and you're getting close to what must be the saddest license of all time. Even the most hardened of Neighbours fans will be dreadfully disappointed with this inept little title."

24% - Amiga Format (August 1992)



Within your garage workshop you can choose your opponents from a roll call of Charlene Ramsey or 'Lenny' in the C64 version (played by Kylie Minogue of course) who rides in a go-kart, Henry Ramsey (Craig McLachlan) whose preference is a lawnmower tractor, skateboarding Mike Young (Guy Pearce), hell's angel wannabe Matt Robinson (played by Ashley Paske and best remembered for his motorbike accident which almost resulted in girlfriend Gemma losing a leg), and finally Bronwyn Davies (Rachel Friend) with her three-wheeler motorbike, who oddly doesn't appear in the C64 or Speccy version at all.



Curiously critics at the time seemed overly concerned that some of the line-up had already departed the show, as if the game would crumble in on itself if it wasn't an accurate reflection of what was currently occurring on screen. Although I think that particular ship had long since sailed leaving Zeppelin flailing on the boardwalk, so let's not split hairs!

At least it's reassuring to see that having paralysed Jane Harris for life while carrying her as a pillion passenger, Mike has sensibly chosen to leave motorbikes behind him.



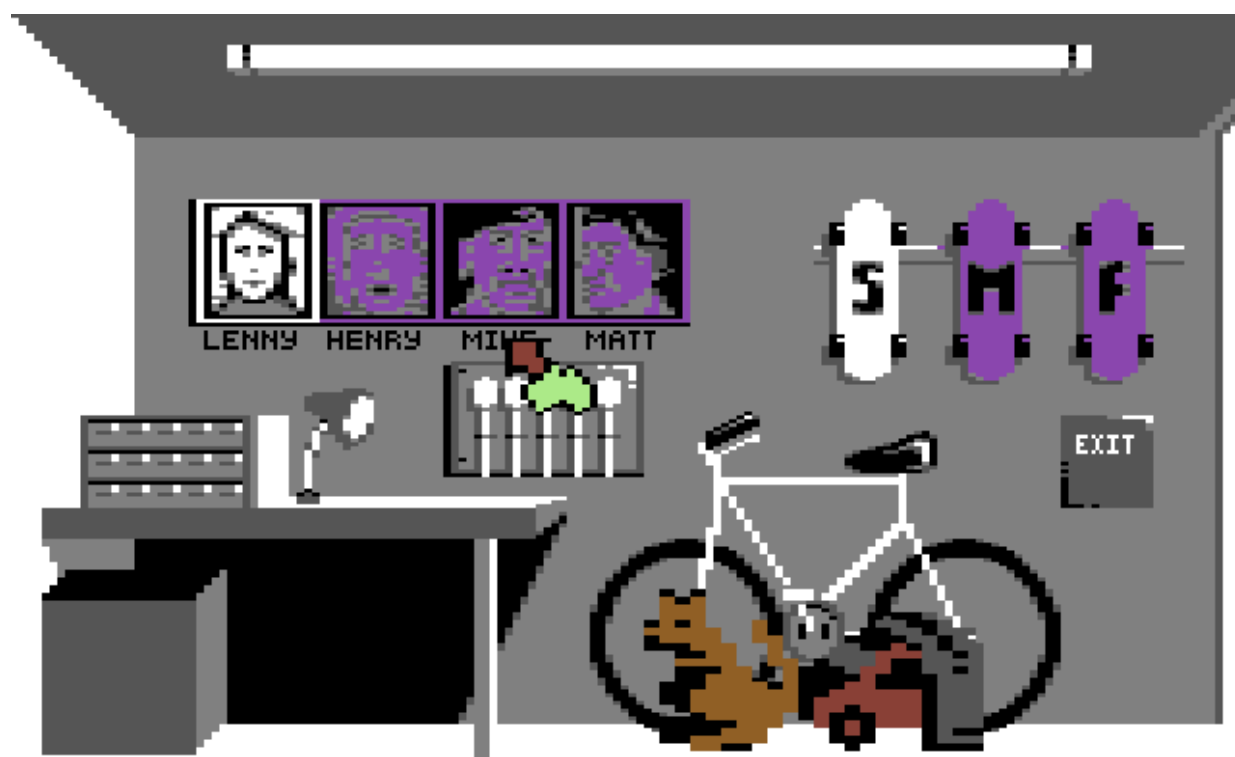
From the same menu you can select the density of obstacles you should expect to encounter (by drawing back the blanket covering the kangaroo and car), and the handling/speed of your board, from beginner, through intermediate to advanced. Deviating slightly, over on the Spectrum this graphical menu is replaced with text options, and you only have two board speeds from which to choose.



"So is this a good game? Well, it's okay in a naff sort of way. Like in Viz, they've merely taken some of the characters and bunged them into a spurious race. But unlike Viz there's very little evidence of actual character here. Scott doesn't for instance have any speech bubbles that say 'strewth' or whatever it is they say. Maybe this is no bad thing, but if you're going to have a license, you might just as well use it.

Technically it's smooth enough, and there's a nice jingle to go with the game. As a skateboard race game it's all good fun, and pretty damned addictive, but you'd find it hard to really justify the asking price. The best thing to do with this is buy it as a birthday pressie for a Neighbours fan in the family, and then hide away and play it yourself..."

72% - Charlene Format (February 1992)



Fire accelerates, backwards decelerates, while left and right movement causes you to rotate anti-clockwise or clockwise. Handling your board appears a bit frenetic at first because the controls are hypersensitive, though once you learn that you can't simply hold down the fire button at all times you soon get the hang of it. From then on you'll only find yourself crashing 10 times a minute rather than 20 so it's totally manageable.

"I can't say Neighbours, the game, particularly impressed me. I've watched the TV show a couple of times and didn't recognise any of the character sprites in the game. It's the type of terribly simple game where you just rush around avoiding obstacles. In short, Neighbours wouldn't be good value for money even on a budget label, at full price it's a rip-off."

42% - Crash! (January 1992)



Four key locations from the TV show become your racetracks - Ramsey Street, Lassiter's Complex (home to a hotel, bar, law firm, courtyard and Lassiter's Lake), Erinsborough High and Anson's Corner (where the shopping centre is situated). Each track must be attempted twice (clockwise and anti-clockwise), with two laps forming the basis of each race. They're the rules, I don't know. Take it up with Harold Bishop, he's organising it.



Sets of illuminated traffic cone beacons (and other various waypoints later) are positioned at regular interludes and must be passed between to earn enough points to finish the race, whilst collisions with obstacles and other characters depletes your 'energy', measured in terms of your popularity with the audience, represented by a colour-draining Neighbours logo. In fact, this ebbs away gradually regardless of how well you ride as time ticks down, so there's no time to lose.

It's all rush-rush with this game. Anyone would think it's some kind of competitive course-negotiating exercise against

the clock, although I don't know what the word for that would be.



To combat dips in your popularity and stay on the road, litter can be collected by running into it as you scoot around the set. Harold Bishop must be up there on a pedestal in that case. Ramsey Street residents don't come more public spirited than old jelly belly, the Salvation Army volunteer.

Bonuses are awarded at the end of each race, determined by your current popularity rating. If this plunges to zero you're ejected from the show and it's game - and contract - over, forcing you to get a real job and work for a living instead. Alternatively, you could just hit fire to try again, and postpone that ordeal a bit longer.



Finishing first in all four areas results in a quickie congratulations message superimposed over the usual Lassiter's Complex backdrop that appears between levels, and that's all folks. You can now stick the box on the shelf and play Neighbours the board game instead. I had that once upon a time... and never opened it once. Did anyone, ever? Are they all still shrink-wrapped and pristine in the back of people's wardrobes?

"Right, well to sum up Neighbours, it's a rather entertaining 3D scroller with a quirky control system and the most frustrating obstacles to get round ever. If you're the sort of bod who never gives up until you've beaten a game, you'll have to work hard at the four levels in Neighbours. In fact, I'll be very surprised if you don't chew your joystick to bits before you get that far.

The other thing is that nearly all the characters in the game have actually left the show. If you're a fan of the series as it is now, you might be a bit miffed by this. Perhaps Zeppelin could release weekly expansion packs

keeping us up to date with the plot twists. Or perhaps not.

Yes, I enjoyed Neighbours. Oh, sure, it's a bit crap. The pictures of the stars which appear on the monitors are perfectly dreadful and completely unrecognisable. But then again, so are most of the cast. So I suppose it's okay. But playability is good, graphics are smooth and, cos it's tough, there's plenty of mileage in it. So it's er, beaut, ripper, bonzer and um, arvo."

81 degrees - Your Sinclair issue 73 (January 1992)



As the budget novelty diversion it soon became, it's not such a terrible way to while away a spare five minutes. Nevertheless, Neighbours could have been infinitely more fun had it incorporated a multiplayer versus or co-op option. Perhaps even a weapon of some sort might have jazzed up what is otherwise a rather bland, repetitive 'getting from A to B' simulator. I wouldn't have imagined clinging steadfastly to

reality was the be-all and end-all topping the list of priorities after all.

Now if you'll excuse me I've got kangaroos and ostriches to shoo out of my jacuzzi. Those critters get everywhere if you forget to spray with repellent!

